

Message Text

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LIMDIS

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QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0306

LIMDIS

ALSO PASS AID/W

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TAGS: PFOR, US, DM

SUBJ: THE FUTURE OF BENIN-US RELATIONS: SHOULD WE MAINTAIN

AN EMBASSY IN COTONOU?

REF (A) USUN 535 (NOTAL), (B) COTONOU 273, (C) STATE 37491

(NOTAL),

SUMMARY: RELATONS BETWEEN THE US AND BENIN ARE AT THEIR ALL-
TIME LOW. COUNTRY TEAM HAS EXAMINED ALTERNAIVE COURSES OF ACTION
WHICH THE USG MIGHT FOLLOW IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES.

MAJORITY OF COUNTRY TEAM RECOMMENDS THAT WE GIVE BENIN A GRACE
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PERIODDURING WHICH WE WATCH FOR A MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENT
IN OUR RELATIONS BASED ON GPRB ACTIONS BEFORE DECIDING
WHETHER OR NOT TO CLOSE DOWN OUR EMBASSY. END SUMMARY

1. PRIOR TO AMB' DEPARTURE COUNTRY TEAM HAD DISCUSSED PREPARATION OF A CABLE PRESENTING OUR VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF THIS EMBASSY. THE ADVANCING OF THE AMB'S DEPARTURE DID NOT ALLOW TIME TO PREPARE IT WITH HIS PARTICIPATION. THE COUNTRY TEAM HAS PREPARED THE FOLLOWING ANALYSIS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE AMB AND THE DEPT.

2. BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE US AND BENIN HAVE REACHED THE LOWEST POINT IN THEIR 15 YEAR HISTORY. THE PROBLEMS BETWEEN US ARE MULTIPLE: (A) THE GPRB CONSIDERES THAT OUR AMB HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY FOSTERING A DETERIORATION IN OUR RELATIONS, AND HAS RETALIATED WITH TREATMENT OF THE AMB BY PRES KEREKOU, FORNMIN ALLADAYE, AND OTHERS WHICH HAS BEEN DISGRACEFUL TO SAY THE LEAST. (B) BENIN HAS INVARIABLY VOTED AGAINST THE US ON IMPORTANT ISSUES BEFORE THE UN (KOREA, GUAM, PUERTO RICO ETC.). (C) STATEMENTS BY AMB ADJIBADE BOTH AT THE UN AND THE OAU HAVE BEEN CONSISTENTLY AMONG THE MOST ANTI-AMERICAN OF ANY MEMBER OF THOSE ORGANIZATIONS. (C) THE LOCAL PRESS TREATS THE US AS THE WORLD'S LEADING IMPERIALIST POWER. (E) THE GPRB HAS BEEN DISSATISFIED OVER SUSPENSION AND CONTINUED LACK OF PROGRESS ON THE COTONOU BRIDGE/DAM PROJECT. (F) WE ARE UNDER THREAT OF EVICTION FROM OUR CHANCERY. (G) PROGRESS TOWARD INDEMNIFICATION OF THE US FIRMS NATIONALIZED IN DEC 74 (TEXACO AND MOBIL) HAS BEEN NON-EXISTENT UNTIL ONLY A MONTH AGO. OTHER POTENTIAL PROBLEMS FACING US ARE: (A) POSSIBLE BENINESE DISSATISFACTION WITH THE US REFUSAL TO PROVIDE FUNDS REQUIRED TO BUILD THE COTONOU BRIDGE WITHOUT CUTTING DOWN ON ITS SIZE AND DEMANDING ONE THOUSANDPERCENT GREATER COUNTER-PART CONTRIBUTION BY THE PBRB; (B) THERE IS STILL THE POSSIBILITY OF INVOKING THE HICKEN-LOOPER AMENDMENT, AND (C) RENTING DIFFICULTIES WITH THE AMB'S RESIDENCE RESULTING FROM THE GPRB'S CONFISCATION OF THE PROPERTY FROM THE LANDLORD. FUNDAMENTAL TO A NUMBER OF OUR DIFFERNCES IS THE BELIEF HELD BY MANY GPRB LEADERS THAT THIS COUNTRY'S OPTION FOR MARXIST-LENINISM HAS TURNED THE USG AGAINST THIS GOVT.

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3. US INTERESTS IN BENIN ARE NIL. THERE IS NO AMERICAN INVESTMENT LEFT IN THE COUNTRY. TRADE IS MINISCULE. UP TO NOW IT HAS BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO OBTAIN BENIN'S SUPPORT ON ANY INTERNATIONAL ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO US. THERE ARE ONLY 150 AMERICANS IN THE COUNTRY AND TWO-THIRDS OF THESE ARE HERE UNDER USG AUSPICES.

4. THE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS WILL ENCOURAGE SOME TO RECOMMEND THE CLOSURE OF THE US MISSION IN BENIN, AND WE WOULD LIKE TO EXAMINE THIS AND OTHER OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO US AT THIS TIME. THE COUNTRY TEAM HAS ENUMERATED FOUR OPTIONS: (A) IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF USG PERSONNEL AND CLOSURE OF THIS EMBASSY; (B) IMMEDIATE PUNITIVE STEPS WITH EMBASSY SCALE DOWN; (C)A WAITING

PERIOD DURING WHICH WE WATCH FOR A MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENT IN OUR RELATIONS BASED ON GPRB ACTIONS BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT TO CLOSE DOWN, AND (D) THE MAINTENANCE OF AN AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE HERE EVEN WITHOUT IMPROVEMENT IN GPRB ACTIONS OR POLICIES.

5. OPTION A. IMMEDIATE CLOSURE OF THE EMASSY. THIS ACTION SHOULD BE ADOPTED IF THE DEPT FEELS THAT WE HAVE NOTHING TO GAIN HERE EVEN IF THE STATE OF OUR RELATIONS WERE TO IMPROVE. NON-RESIDENT REPRESENTATION COULD BE OFFERED FROM A NEIGHBORING POST (LAGOS, LOME, ABIDJAN, NIAMEY). IT WOULD MAKE CLEAR TO BENIN THAT WE BELIEVE THEY HAVE GONE TOO FAR AND COULD SERVE AS A WARNING TO OTHER MINI-STATES WHO FEEL THEY CAN DO WHATEVER THEY WISH WITHOUT REGARD TO US INTERESTS. HOWEVER, THIS OPTION IS A HIGH RISK ONE EVEN TO OUR MINIMAL INTERESTS IN THE COUNTRY. A HASTY US WITHDRAWAL, WHICH COULD NOT BE KEPT A SECRET IN THIS SMALL COMMUNITY, WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY LEAD TO A STRONG REACTION BY THE GPRB. PROPERTY OF PERSONNEL AND USG WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE SEIZED AND HARASSMENT OF OUR PERSONNEL WOULD BE INTENSE. PHYSICAL DANGER TO PERSONNEL SHOULD NOT BE COMPLETELY DISCOUNTED. IT WOULD ALSO PRECLUDE THE AMERICAN OIL COMPANIES (MOBIL AND TEXACO) RECEIVING ANY INDEMNIFICATION FOR THEIR INTERESTS. IT WOULD LEAVE THE RESIDENT AMERICAN MISSIONARIES AND MK (WHICH IS BUILDING THE AID-FINANCED PARAKOU-MALANVILLE ROAD) WITH NO TIME TO PREPARE THEIR OWN WITHDRAWAL IF THIS IS CALLED FOR. THIS ALTERNATIVE APPEARS PRECIPITATE AND OF GREATEST RISK TO PRIVATE US INTERESTS AND LIFE. ASSUMING THAT CLOSURE OF THE EMBASSY WOULD BE ACCOM-
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PANIED BY TERMINATION OF OUR AID PROGRAM, WE WOULD ALSO LEAVE THE IBRD AND AFDB, WITH WHOM WE HAVE JOINT PROJECTS, IN A LURCH. OTHER FRIENDLY AFRICAN NATIONS (PRINCIPALLY NIGER) WHO WILL PROBABLY REAP MORE BENEFITS FROM OUR REGIONALLY ORIENTED TRANSPORT PROJECTS IN BENIN THAN THE BENINESE WOULD ALSO SUFFER.

6. OPTION B. IMMEDIATE PUNITIVE STEPS WITH EMBASSY SCALEDOWN. IMMEDIATE PUNITIVE ACTION SHORT OF A COMPLETE CLOSEOUT COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED BY WITHDRAWAL OF THE COTONOU BRIDGE PROJECT AND SCALING DOWN OF THE EMBASSY. SCALING DOWN SHOULD INCLUDE INDEFINITE DEFERRAL OF THE RETURN OF AMB, AND POSSIBLE WITHDRAWAL OF OUR AID OFFICER, THE PC AND/OR USIS. THIS PLAN WOULD STILL GIVE US REPRESENTATION TO FOLLOW UP ON INDEMNIFICATION AND OFFER CONSULAR PROTECTION TO OUR CITIZENS. BOTH THESE TASKS WOULD BE MADE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT SINCE ADOPTION OF THIS OPTION IS LIKELY TO PROVIDE AN IMMEDIATE ANGRY REACTION BY THE GPRB AND ACCELERATE A FURTHER DETERIORATION IN OUR RELATIONS.
CHESO

QI OPTION C. WAIT AND SEE. ALLOW BENIN A FEW MORE MONTHS.

RECENTLY WE HAVE HAD INDICATIONS THAT THE GPRB BELEIVED THIS EMBASSY WAS NOT IN STEP WITH USG POLICY. IN THEIR OPINION THE PROBLEMS IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS EMANATED PRINCIPALLY FROM OUR EMBASSY. THE DEPSEC'S CONVOCAION OF AMB BOYA MAY OPEN THE GPRB'S EYES TO THE REALITY THAT THIS EMBASSY HAS BEEN EXPRESSING THE USG'S VIEWS ALL ALONG. THE RECALL OF THE AMB UNDERSCORES OUR UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THE KIND OF TREATMENT GIVE US LAST WEEK. FURTHERMORE THIS OPTION GIVES US A GRACE PERIOD IN WHICH TO GET A CLEAR READING ON WHETHER THE GPRB DESIRES IMPROVEMENT IN OUR RELATIONS. THE USG'S RESPONSE ON THE CHANCERY EVICTION (STATE 35068) AND ON THE AMB'S RESIDENCE (COTONOU 203) ARE NOW BEFORE THE GPRB. THE AID-MEMOIRE ON THE BRIDGE/DAM (STATE 45136) IS IN THE HANDS OF BOTH PRES KEREKOU AND FORNMIN ALLADAYE. THE BENINESE REACTIONS ON THESE ISSUES SHOULD PROVIDE US WITH THE NECESSARY SIGNALS. NEGOTIATIONS ON INDEMNIFICATION OF THE OIL COMPANIES CAN OPEN ANY TIME AFTER FEB 20 AND WITHIN A MATTER OF WEEKS AFTER THEY BEGIN WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO TELL IF THE GPRB IS SINCERE IN EFFORTS TO ARRIVE AT A JUST SETTLEMENT. THE FIREBRAND ADJIBADE HAS
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LEFT THE UN AND ACCORDING TO CABLES FROM THE DEPT, AMB BOYA APPEARS TO BE MORE REASONABLE THAN WE HAD EXPECTED (N.B. BOYA IS A PROVEN REVOLUTIONARY, WHEREAS ADJIBADE, A CAREER CIVIL SERVANT, HAD TO EARN HIS FEATHERS AS ONE AT THE UN). IN TIME WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO TELL IF BOYA WILL ADOPT A MORE SENSIBLE TONE IN HIS STANCE AT THE UN. THE MEDIA ARE FIRMLY CONTROLLED BY INFORMATION AND NATIONAL ORIENTATION MINISTER AZONHIHO, AN AVOWED ENEMY OF THE US AND THEREFORE WE DOUBT THE GPRB WILL CEASE ITS LOCAL PRESS ATTACKS ON THE US. IF, IN THE END, WE SHOULD DECIDE THAT THERE IS NO HOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT AND SHOULD CLOSE DOWN, THIS OPTION WOULD ALLOW US SUFFICIENT TIME TO DO SO IN AN ORDERLY FASHION BOTH FOR THE USG PRESENCE AND PRIVATE US INTERESTS.

8. OPTION D. MAINTENANCE OF STATUS QUO. MAINTAIN AN AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE AND CURRENT AID, USIS AND PEACE CORPS LEVELS WITHOUT AN IMPROVMENT IN RELATIONS. THE BASIC PREMISES OF THIS CHOICE ARE THAT OUR CURRENT PROGRAMS REQUIRE ABOUT THE SAME PERSONNEL LEVEL AS WE NOW HAVE, THAT ANY REDUCTION OF THESE PROGRAMS WOULD BE VIEWED BY THE GPRB AS PUNITIVE, AND THAT PUNITIVE ACTIONS WOULD BE COUNTER PRODUCTIVE. ADOPTION OF THIS OPTION WOULD ENABLE US TO PROVIDE BETTER CONSULAR PROTECTION, AND THE CURRENT US AID PROJECTS COULD BE MORE READILY COMPLETE. THE US POSITION COULD ALSO BE MORE EASILY PLACED BEFORE THE GPRB THOUGH IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT WE COULD INFLUENCE ITS DECISION. ADOPTION OF SUCH AN OPTION WOULD GIVE THE GREEN LIGHT TO THE GPRB TO CONTINUE ITS UNFRIENDLY ATTITUDE TOWARD THE US. OUR PRESTIGE ELSEWHERE MIGHT THEREFORE SUFFER. FUTURE PROTESTS AND THREATS ON OUR PART WOULD BE MEANINGLESS. THE RADICAL ELEMENTS MIGHT FEEL FREE TO ENGAGE IN ADDITIONAL HARASSMENT WHICH COULD EVEN ENDANGER

AMERICAN LIVES.

9. ACTION RECOMMENDED. THAT WE ALLOW THE BENINESE GOVT A FEW MORE MONTHS (OPTION C) TO SHOW A WILLINGNESS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS. SUCH WILLINGNESS WOULD BE DEMONSTRATED BY MORE ACCEPTABLE CONDUCT IN INTERNATIONAL FORA AND IN ITS DEALINGS WITH US REPS, PROGRESS ON INDEMNIFICATION, AND REASONABLENESS IN THE CHANCERY NEGOTIATIONS. IF RELATIONS IMPROVE, OUR PRESENCE WOULD BE MAINTAINED; IF NOT, AN ORDERLY PHASE OUT COULD IMPLEMENTED. ONE MEMBER OF THE COUNTRY TEAM
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DISSENTS FROM ABOVE RECOMMENDATION AND FAVORS OPTION B ON THE BASIS OF THE TREATMENT ACCORDED OUR AMB LAST WEEK.
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